



The Irreducible Needs of Families in King County

1. What are the irreducible needs that must be met for children and families to thrive?
2. How are we, as a community, succeeding at meeting those essential needs for families with children?

In order to answer the two questions above, the King County Children and Family Commission (CFC) has undertaken a multi-year initiative to achieve the following goals:

- Clarify what we as a community believe are the irreducible — or essential — needs for all families with children;
- Propose ways to measure how families with children are doing with respect to having these needs met;
- Apply these measures to districts in King County to see where we are successful and where there are gaps in our families' well-being; and,
- Increase the momentum to build on success and focus action in areas of families' greatest needs as measured over time.

The CFC feels an increasing urgency to ensure that the needs of all families with children are met. Through input gathered in surveys, focus groups, and work with a diverse group of advisors, the CFC's recent work deepens the community-wide understanding of the need for a focus on the well-being of families with children.

Three core findings from the CFC's recent work with families have emerged:

- Widespread agreement exists for a holistic concept of family well-being as proposed by the Commission;
- Current data from a variety of sources shed light on areas where families report they are doing well, where their essential needs remain unmet, and what ideas families themselves have for help in meeting their needs;
- Families who are ethnically and linguistically diverse are often not captured in survey data. CFC focus groups with diverse families showed that their experiences differ from those families who responded to surveys, and that the unmet needs of diverse families were different from county-wide measures of family well-being.

What do all families need?

The Commission began the Irreducible Needs project by gathering families, researchers, policy makers, service providers, and others who care about family well-being to help identify a common list of needs shared by all families. During an all-day event, called the Children's Summit, held in late 2007, three broad categories of needs were identified: good health, supportive social and cognitive environments, and neighborhoods that are safe and strong.

Participants were challenged to identify specific needs within these categories. This list would be a starting point for gathering relevant data to reflect overall family well-being in our county, track progress over time, and bring a comprehensive understanding of what families need into important policy and funding decision-making.

Testing this list of needs through surveys, interviews, research advisory discussion groups, and focus groups with families, the CFC confirmed that people in King County agree that all families need the following:

GOOD HEALTH	SUPPORTIVE SOCIAL AND COGNITIVE ENVIROMENTS	SAFE, STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS
Adequate, healthy, nutritional food	Stable secure relationships with competent caring adults where children are emotionally and physically protected and nurtured	Economic opportunities that provide a livable wage
Affordable wellness care — including dental and mental care	Supportive culturally relevant resource networks (where people feel they are understood)	Affordable housing
	Learning experiences that start at birth and continue throughout the lifespan, that are high quality, developmentally and culturally appropriate and prepare children for school readiness and academic success	Safe neighborhoods

What indicators exist to tell us how families in King County are doing?

The Commission then researched a range of possible measures of family well-being. A wealth of reliable data is collected about many aspects of the health of King County residents. Yet not all of the irreducible needs identified by the CFC are captured by existing data. For some needs, we have many different measures that tell part of the story. For example we have access to excellent data about housing costs, household income, physical health, employment and the economy; however, few — or no — ways exist where we currently gather county-wide data on needs such as learning experiences, stable and nurturing relationships, and supportive culturally relevant networks.

The following chart shows indicators for some of the irreducible needs:

DOMAIN OF NEED	KING COUNTY	DATA SOURCE/ INSTRUMENT
Affordable Wellness Care		
Percent of Children without Health Insurance	3.2%	<i>Communities Count 2008</i>
Stable, Secure Relationships		
Percent of Children Reporting a Low Quality of Life	8th — 20.6% 10th — 23.8% 12th — 28.5%	<i>Healthy Youth Survey 2006/ Hawkins & Catalano Quality of Life Scale</i>
Percent of Children Reporting They Have Been Abused by an Adult	8th — 16.4% 10th — 15.3% 12th — 16.4%	<i>Healthy Youth Survey 2006</i>
Learning Experiences		
Percent of Children with Problems in at Least One Area of School Readiness (Selected King County Cities)	Bellevue — 26.3% Shoreline — 29.2% Highline — 29.4%	<i>Communities Count 2005/Early Development Instrument (Updated in March 2006)</i>
Economic Opportunities		
Percent of Families Below Self-Sufficiency Standard	16.7%	<i>2007. Overlooked and Undercounted: Wages, Work, and Poverty in WA State/Self-Sufficiency Standard</i>
Affordable Housing		
Percent of Rental Housing Stock That is Affordable to Low and Very Low Income Households	Very Low — .1% Low — 43.9% Moderate — 50%	<i>Communities Count 2005</i>
Housing Affordability Gap for Median Income Home Buyers	<i>Median Home Price:</i> \$455,000 <i>Affordable Home Price:</i> \$249,500	<i>Communities Count 2008</i>
Safe Neighborhoods		
Percent of Adults Who Reported: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their neighborhood is close-knit. • People in their neighborhood can be trusted. • People in their neighborhood willing to help their neighbors. • People in their neighborhood do not share the same values. • People in their neighborhood generally don't get along with each other. 	54% 82% 84% 22% 8%	<i>Communities Count 2005/Taken from Robert Sampson's Instruments for Collective Efficacy</i>

What are families telling us through survey data in this project?

As a participating sponsor of the Seeds of Compassion events, a major regional gathering of thousands of people in the spring of 2008, the CFC was able to collect voluntary paper survey data from approximately 500 attendees, most of whom answered an optional question that confirmed they are residents of King County. The following major findings were obtained:

- Virtually all of the respondents supported the list of irreducible needs
- Some additional needs were suggested, such as a healthy and sustainable natural environment
- Most respondents reported that their own family has its needs met
- Many believed that while their family was doing well, many families in King County were not having their essential needs met

The respondents in this Seeds of Compassion group generally believe that there are areas of significant unmet need for most families in King County. The areas of greatest perceived unmet need for others, in priority order, are:

1. Affordable wellness care
2. Affordable housing
3. Economic opportunities

In terms of how they describe themselves, those who say some needs are unmet by their own families identify the following areas, in priority order:

1. Affordable housing
2. Affordable wellness care
3. Economic opportunities

In other words, what they identify as their own top three unmet needs match what they perceive as the top three unmet needs for other families.

The following chart shows data from this survey:

Seeds of Compassion Event Survey — Spring 2008 (N=475)

AREA OF NEED	BELIEVE THIS NEED IS UNMET FOR MOST FAMILIES	MY FAMILY DOES NOT HAVE THIS NEED MET
Adequate food	50%	4%
Affordable housing	70%	30%
Affordable wellness care	74%	25%
Economic opportunities	59%	18%
Education and learning experiences	43%	7%
Safe neighborhood	44%	13%
Stable, secure relationships	45%	8%
Supportive, culturally relevant networks	40%	13%

Following the pilot of this survey at the Seeds of Compassion event in 2008, the survey was refined and distributed on-line to King County residents in the spring of 2009. These survey data of the families offer an interesting comparison to data gathered before the economic downturn.

The respondents in this on-line group also generally believe that there are areas of significant unmet need for most families in King County. The areas of greatest perceived unmet need for others, in priority order, are:

1. Affordable housing
2. Affordable wellness care
3. Economic Opportunities

When asked to identify the one area families most need help, they name the same three needs but in the following order:

1. Affordable housing
2. Economic Opportunities
3. Affordable wellness care

In terms of how they describe themselves, the on-line survey respondents who say some of their own families' needs are unmet identify the following areas, in priority order:

1. Economic opportunities
2. Affordable housing
3. Affordable wellness care

Similar to the Seeds of Compassion event respondents, what they identify as their own top three unmet needs match what they perceive as the top three unmet needs for other families.

The following table shows results from the on-line survey of families:

On-line Survey of King County Families — Spring 2009 (N=305)

AREA OF NEED	BELIEVE THIS NEED IS UNMET FOR MOST FAMILIES	BELIEVE THIS IS THE ONE AREA FAMILIES MOST NEED HELP	MY FAMILY REQUIRES HELP TO MEET THIS NEED
Adequate food	51%	4%	11%
Affordable housing	80%	35%	31%
Affordable wellness care	75%	14%	26%
Economic opportunities	70%	28%	34%
Education and learning experiences	37%	7%	25%
Safe neighborhood	44%	4%	24%
Stable, secure relationships	36%	6%	10%
Supportive, culturally relevant networks	31%	3%	19%

How well are the needs of families from specific cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic groups being met?

When the Irreducible Needs project began and data were collected for the indicators presented at the beginning of this report, many families' needs could be described as being met. Yet the CFC wondered if — and how — the story would be different for various subgroups of families in King County.

Guided by input from policymakers as well as a research advisory group convened for this project, the CFC was encouraged to gather data by interacting directly with families. If approached in a culturally appropriate way, families would have an opportunity to describe their needs, experiences, and desired solutions.

The CFC identified families who are underrepresented in surveys and met the following criteria:

- Seek health and human services in their respective district
- Are known to service providers that include cultural and ethnic agencies and organizations
- Are identified in census and population-based data

Committed to using a culturally competent approach, the CFC followed these steps to create focus groups:

- Connect with a well known community leader within each group and ask that person to lead the focus group.
- Meet with the identified leader and build on an existing relationship or initiate a relationship to plan a focus group appropriate to each group. Explain and familiarize leader with tasks: invite participants, set meeting time and location, lead the discussion, interpret as needed, review and approve summary of group discussion with group input.

The CFC gathered data through nine different focus groups of families who represent people frequently not included in survey data. Two districts in King County, Districts 5 and 6, were chosen to pilot a series of focus groups. The groups of families include:

- Tanzanian
- Somali
- Vietnamese
- Russian-speaking
- Spanish-speaking
- Young parents
- Chinese
- Low-income
- Homeless and formerly homeless youth and young adults

This list of groups is in no way intended to represent a complete picture of the rich diversity of families in King County, or even these two districts within King County. Each group did yield extremely interesting findings about the similarities and differences expressed by these participants based on their own experience and what they know about other families who are members of the same cultural or socioeconomic group.

In focus groups with members of various cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, the CFC found different stories than those told by general data for King County.

KEY FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS OF DIVERSE FAMILIES

The families in all the groups agreed with the comprehensive list of irreducible needs as essential for ALL families.

They all report that their families experience that some of their essential needs are not met.

The levels of unmet need of diverse families differ among themselves, and they differ from the levels of unmet need reported in indicators for the general population.

Families in focus groups most frequently mentioned needing help with:

- Affordable housing
- Supportive, culturally relevant resource networks
- Education and learning experiences - including quality child care

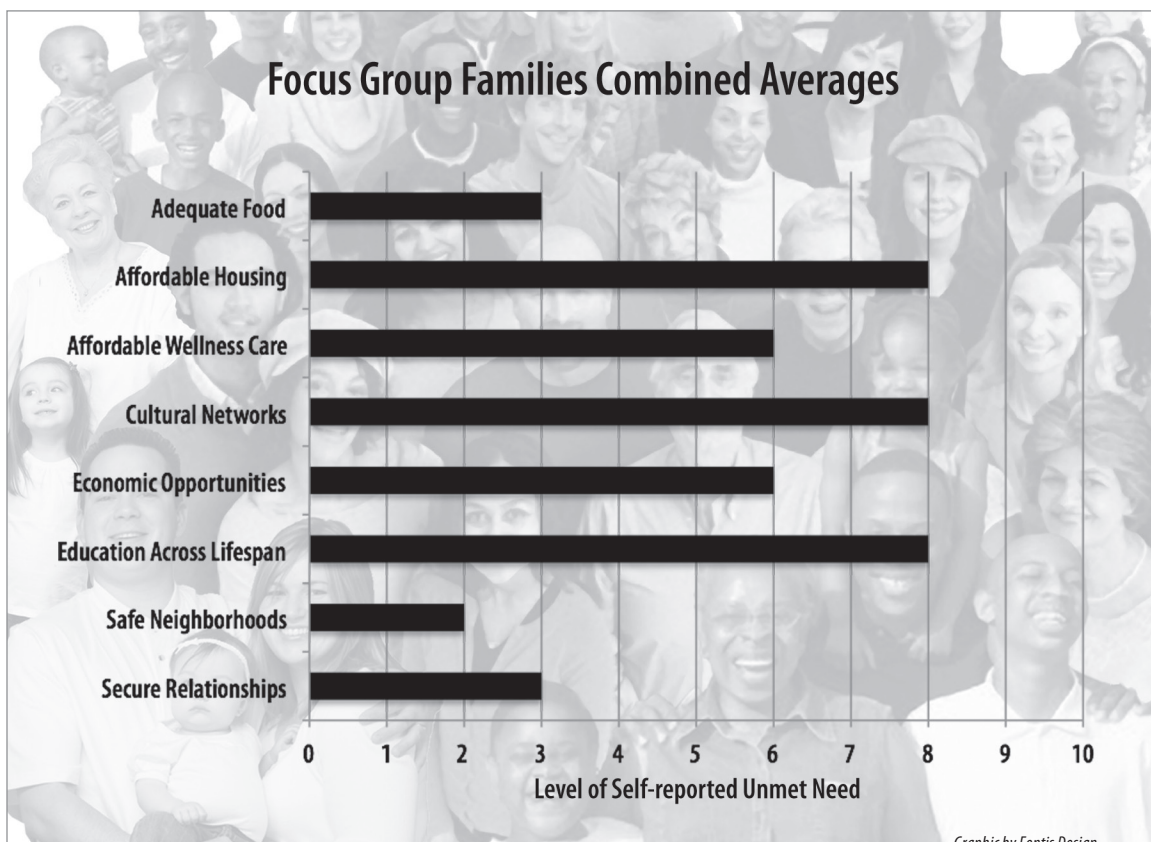
Half of the focus group families mentioned the following unmet needs:

- Economic opportunities/sufficient wages
- Affordable wellness care

Less than half of the focus group families mentioned these as priority areas of unmet need:

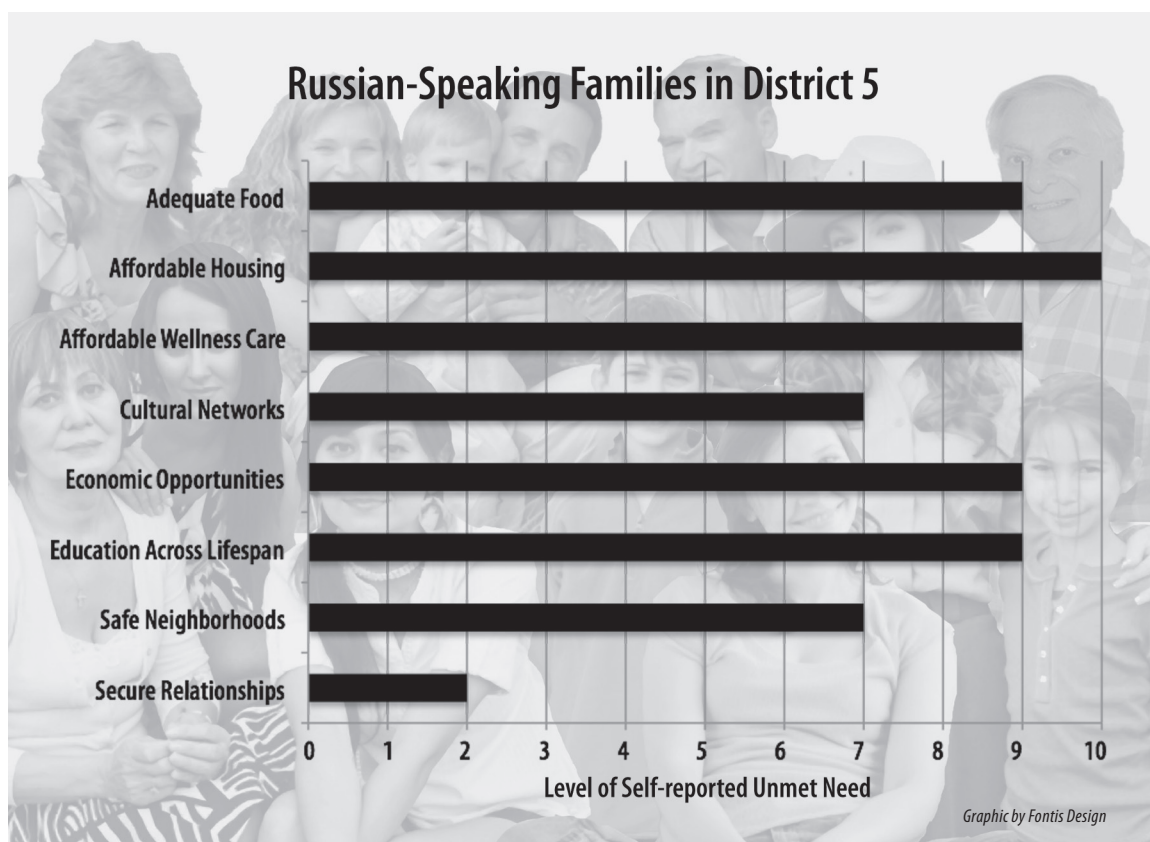
- Adequate, healthy, nutritional food
- Stable, secure relationships
- Safe neighborhoods

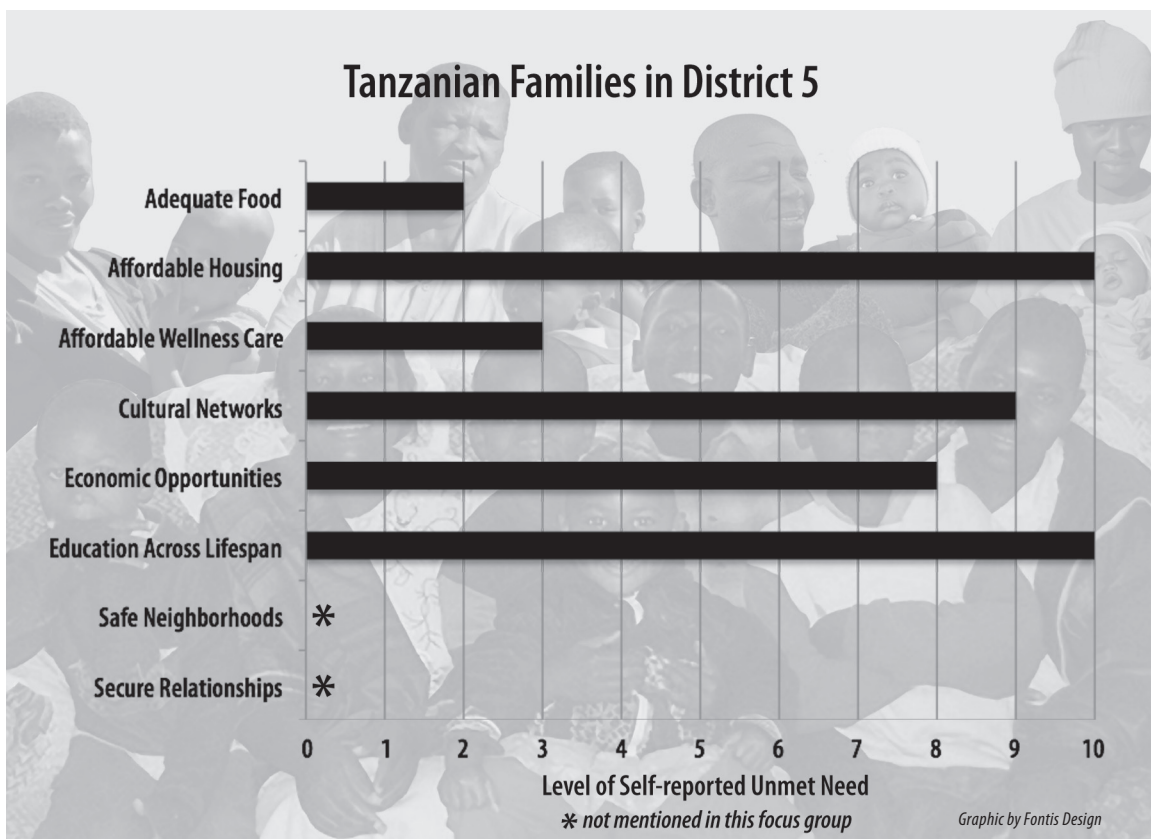
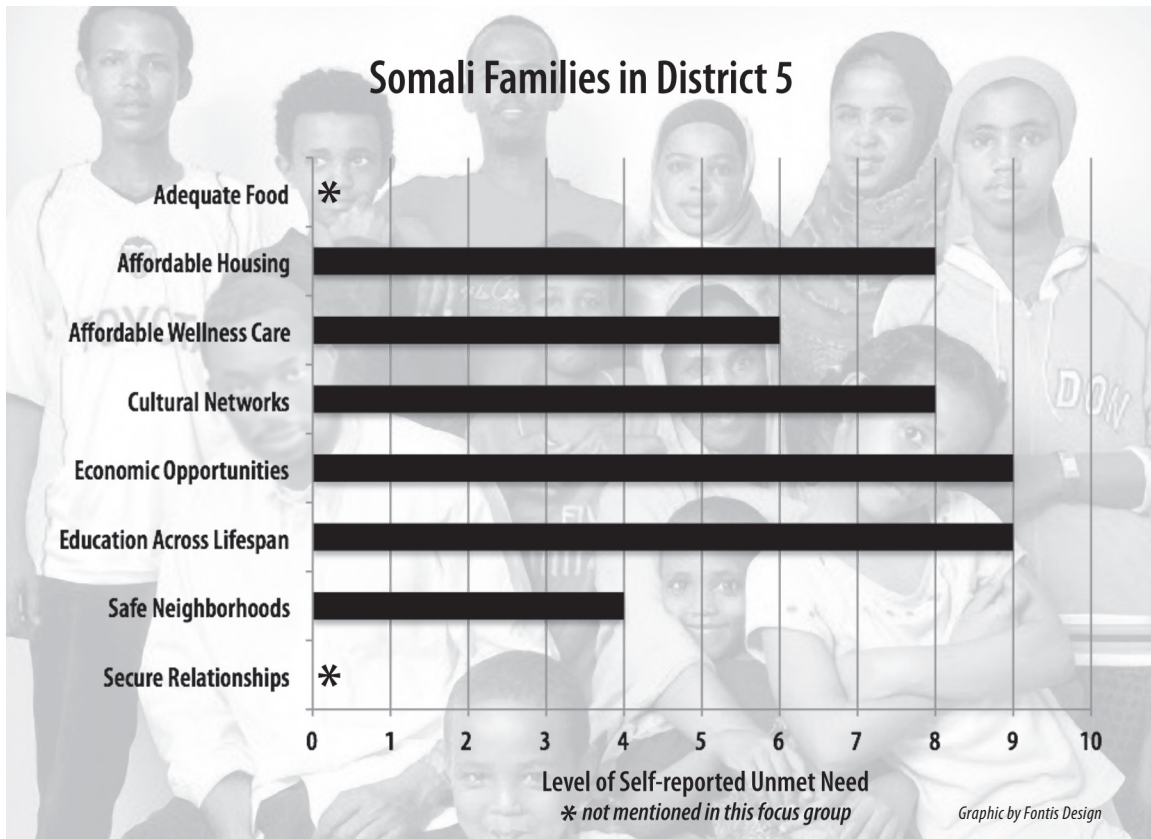
The following graph shows an average level of reported need from all focus group families:



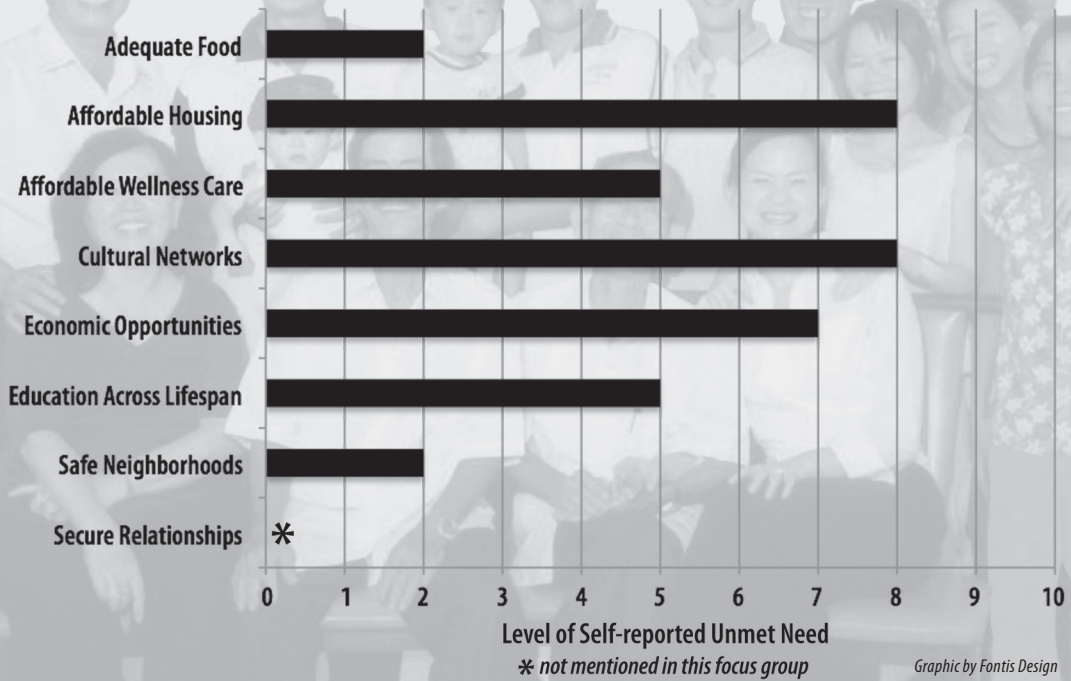
NOTE: The charts that follow display the level of agreement among the participants in each group that a need was unmet for their families. The larger the bar on a scale of 0-10, the more the group agreed that families' needs were not being met in this area. If a need has an asterisk beside it, it simply means that this need was not mentioned in this focus group discussion. Readers are cautioned not to interpret this to mean that the families are satisfied that this need is met for them. It simply means that they did not mention it as an area of unmet need.

Focus Groups of Diverse Families in District 5

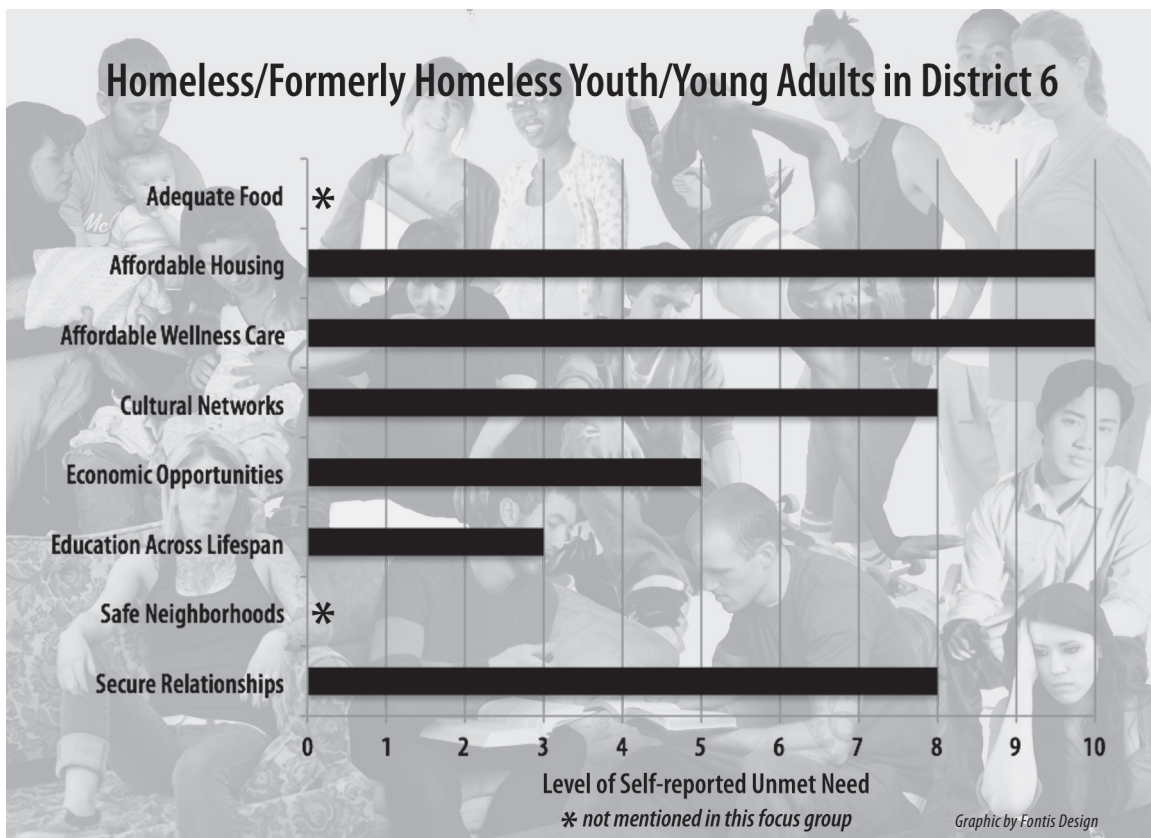
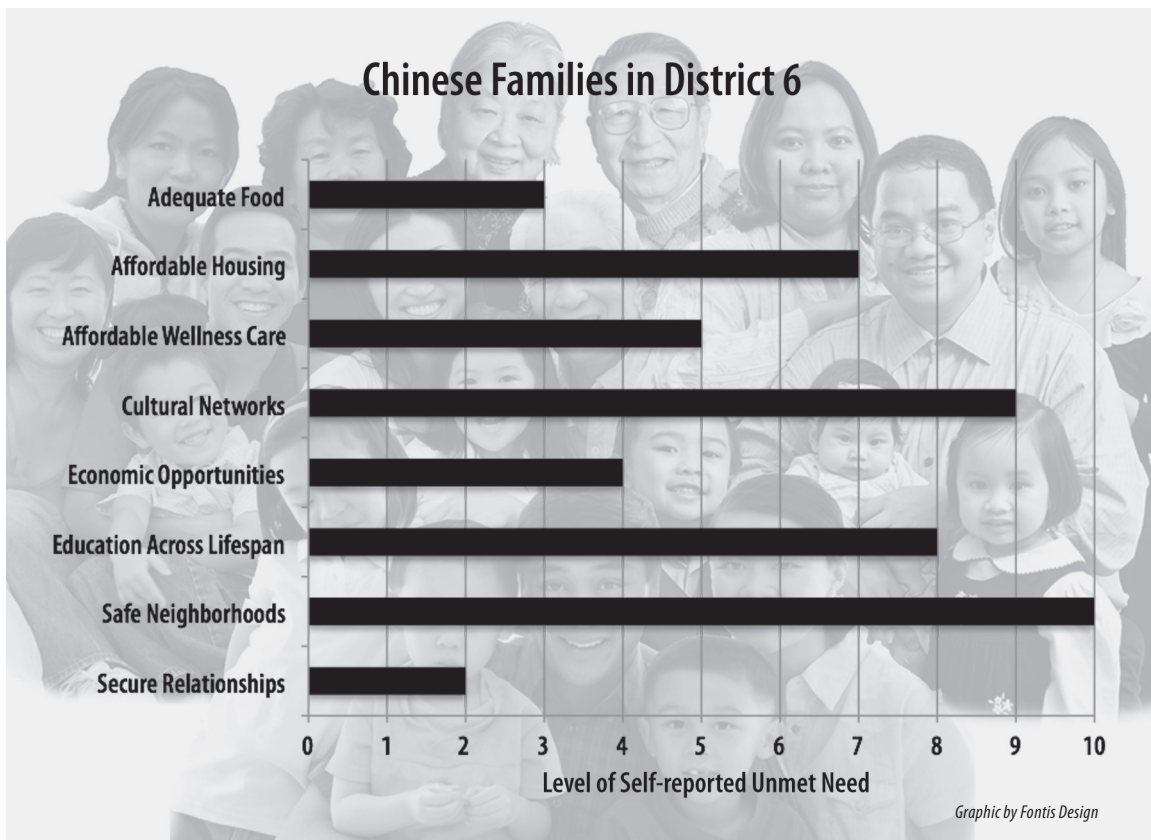


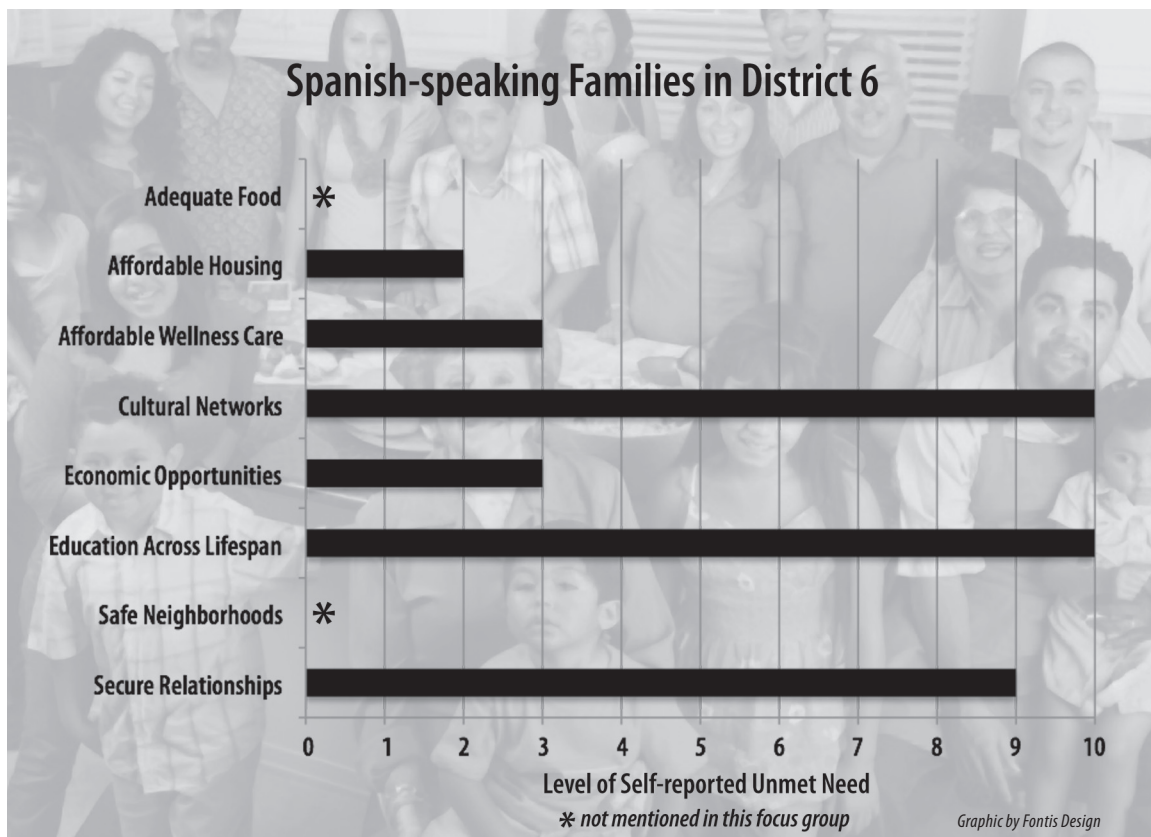
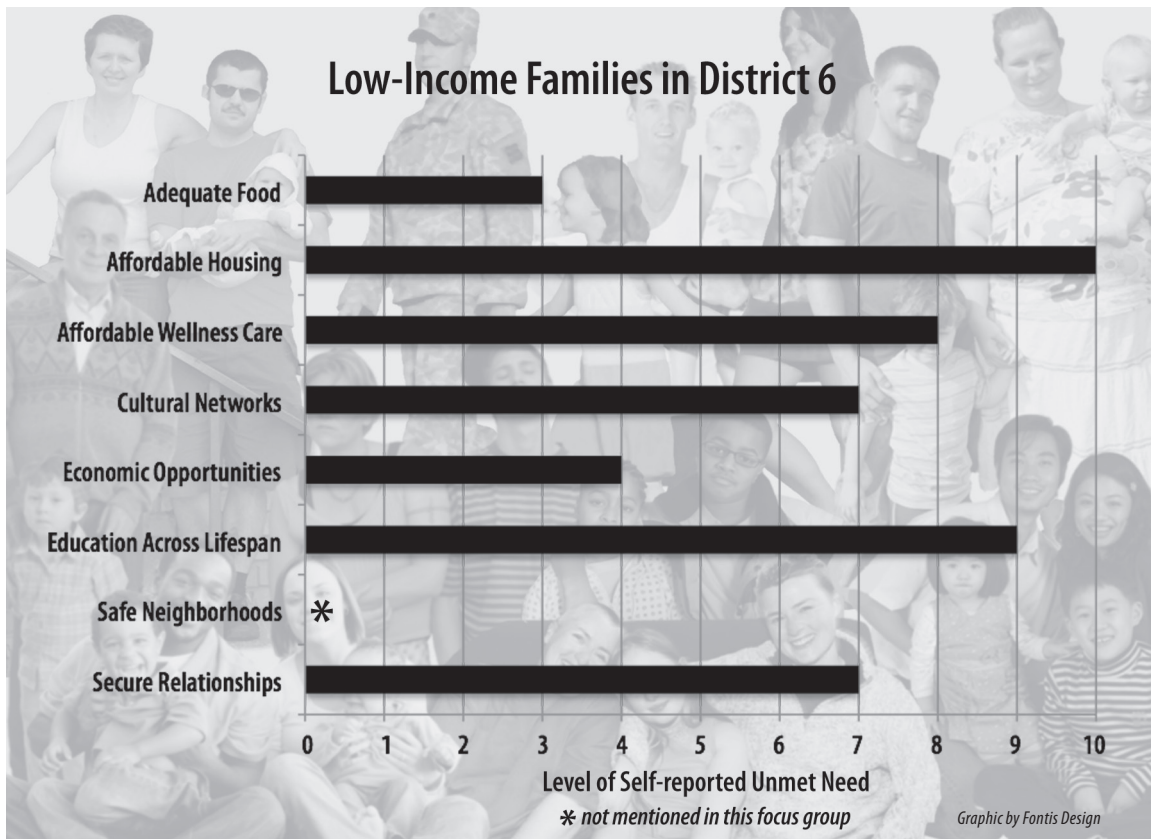


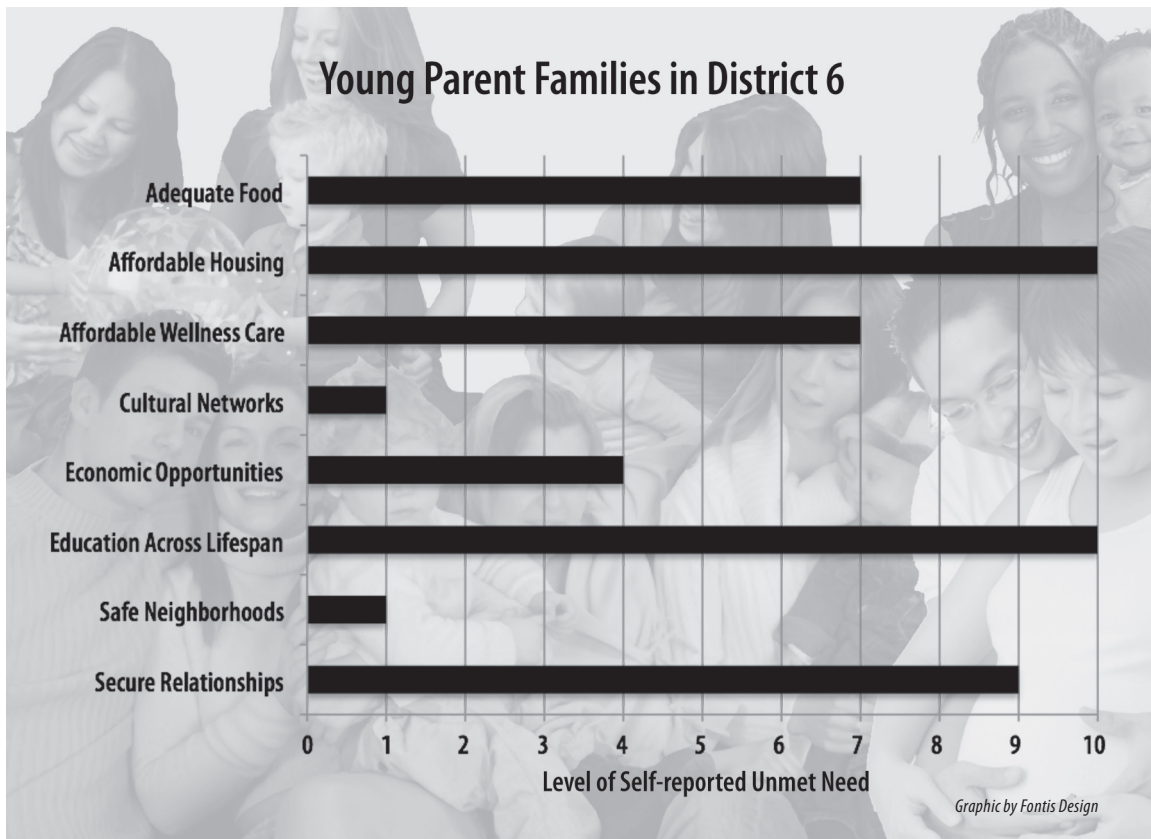
Vietnamese Families in District 5



Focus Groups of Diverse Families in District 6







Cross-cutting themes from focus groups

Across the board, focus group participants agreed that the list of Irreducible Needs identified by the Commission did a good job of capturing the basic needs that all families share. None of the groups identified needs that should be deleted, and some identified particular ways that families like themselves need additional support.

The prioritization was influenced and to some extent was determined by several factors including the acculturation level of the immigrant and refugee groups. The more recently arrived residents who were learning English were struggling to maintain hourly wage jobs and it took them a great deal of effort and energy to find affordable housing, get adequate food, and access wellness care. Not surprising, the most settled immigrants with higher levels of education and an acquired command of English were seeking culturally-specific community resources and support networks. These groups reported that many of their families' basic needs were largely met, and they were more focused on the need for safe neighborhoods.

Many participants added affordable child care and low-cost legal assistance as common needs. The immigrants and refugees identified the need for legal aid pertaining to immigration law; while other groups, including young parents, sought family law assistance. Nearly all parents wished for affordable child care. Low-income parents, regardless of age or ethnic background, sought quality care that was affordable and available.

The following section highlights specific findings related to each need, listed by need in alphabetical order.

Adequate, healthy nutritional food

- Parents with young children find Basic Food Assistance (food stamps) is not adequate and rely on food banks
- Mothers report leaving the food bank with only enough food for a few days
- A trip to the food bank left Eastside families with food that was too old
- Ethnic families do not find foods that they prefer and are familiar with at food banks

Affordable housing

- One and two income families find housing prices beyond their reach
- Transitional housing is not available for very young parents or couples
- Rental units that are affordable are sub-standard, especially for children
- Families on the Eastside and in South King will relocate to get “Move-in Rent Specials” but their children have to face school transitions

Affordable, wellness care

- Older adults can't afford preventive care or supplemental insurance
- The working poor go without prescribed medications and can't afford follow-up care for chronic conditions
- Immigrant parents may not know how to access a care provider for children

Economic opportunities that provide livable wages

- Young parents make choices between buying medicine or diapers and food for their infant
- Hourly wage earners in single income households can't afford rent and food
- Two parent households are not making a sufficient wage to pay for health insurance
- Immigrant parents perceive differential treatment and communication on the job—and fear losing their jobs

Education and learning experiences through life

- Affordable, high quality, culturally competent child care is a high-priority need for many groups
- Parents focus on obtaining English Language Learner help for their students
- Immigrant and refugee parents may not be aware of school district interpretation and translation services and remain uninformed of what the schools expect from parents
- Parents find that English as a Second Language classes do not fit their work schedules so their employment opportunities remain limited

Safe neighborhoods

- Low-income parents in rental units seek neighborhoods free of gang activity
- Families that have met basic needs place a high priority in living in safe neighborhoods

Stable, secure relationships

- Young parents are seeking legal aid to resolve child custody after histories of domestic violence
- Young parents want parenting classes and counseling to improve mental health and strengthen relationships
- Ethnic communities seek to build up stable friendships to support newcomers

Supportive, culturally relevant resource networks

- Eastside ethnic group members request cultural centers and social service agencies to provide programs and services for all family members
- Parents with limited English proficiency desire resource networks that are staffed by bi-lingual, bi-cultural personnel
- Parents request improved translation and interpretation services in city and county Customer Service Offices

FAMILY-PROPOSED ACTION STEPS

Many needs, such as income and access to affordable housing, are deeply interrelated. Support in one area often permits families to be more successful meeting other needs. Many families offered suggestions about changes that would help families meet their needs, and the CFC grouped them into the following areas:

- Increase awareness of what services are available to families and what families need to do to access them
- Increase the awareness of specific needs of different families and their children
- Increase the acceptable stock of housing, and
- Increase specific assistance for poor and immigrant families in the workplace

More details about each of these themes are listed below. Some action steps, like information sharing, could be undertaken relatively quickly, while others, such as increasing the affordable housing stock, requires sustained action over a longer-term.

Increase awareness of what services are available to families and what families need to do to access them

- The working poor need help filling prescribed medications and getting follow-up care for chronic conditions
- Immigrant parents want to know how to access a health care provider for children and obtain preventive care or supplemental insurance for elderly parents

- Families want current information about which food banks have sufficient items to serve families in the later part of the month
- Families want assistance in identifying affordable, high quality, culturally competent child care

Increase the awareness of specific needs of different families and their children

- Model successful culturally competent practices in some county school districts for other school districts not offering as many translation and interpretation services for English language learning children and families
- Provide food banks with information about foods that are preferred by families in their service area
- Support cultural centers and social service agencies to provide programs and services for all family members
- Staff resource networks with bi-lingual, bi-cultural staff
- Increase and improve translation and interpretation services in city and county Customer Service Offices

Increase the stock of housing that is:

- Affordable to low-income families
- Suitable for several generations living together
- Transitional housing for very young parents or couples
- In a safe neighborhood
- Maintained to prevent health hazards such as mold and dumpsters near spaces for children to play outdoors
- Not subject to frequent rent increases after “Move-in Rent Specials,” which subjects children to multiple school transitions

Increase specific assistance for poor and immigrant families in the workplace

- Help immigrant workers facing differential treatment and communication on the job but who fear losing their jobs if they assert their right to observe cultural and religious practices
- Support parents so they can stay in jobs long enough to qualify for health benefits
- Assist immigrant parents with legal needs, such as immigration and understanding contracts
- Provide English classes at different times during the day and evening so they don't interfere with work schedules
- Increase services that strengthen parents' relationships with their children, with each other, and throughout their extended groups
- Provide legal aid for young parents resolving child custody after histories of domestic violence
- Provide young people with counseling to improve mental health and strengthen relationships
- Provide parents with parenting classes to support healthy relationships with their children
- Assist ethnic communities to build up support for newcomers

How do the self-reported needs of families in focus groups compare with survey data from the Irreducible Needs project?

The CFC found that experiences of families representing specific cultural and ethnic groups are different in important ways from both the general population data and the self-reported data in paper and on-line surveys.

The needs that focus group families identified as their own unmet needs are different from the needs the families in the paper and on-line surveys identified as their own unmet needs. Focus group families' self-reported unmet needs also differ from what

families in the surveys identified as the needs they believe most families need help to meet. The families in focus groups also differed from each other in terms of which needs they identified as priorities for help.

As a group, the focus group families describe the following as their priorities for help in meeting their needs — with no single of the following three needs being more important on average than the others:

- Affordable housing
- Education and learning experiences
- Supportive culturally relevant networks

All of the families in the Irreducible Needs project report affordable housing as among the top three unmet needs. Yet only focus group families identify the following as their priorities for help in meeting their families' unmet needs:

- Education and learning experiences
- Supportive culturally relevant networks

The following table compares the data collected from families in this project so far:

Irreducible Needs Data Comparisons

AREA OF NEED	SEEDS OF COMPASSION SURVEY N=475 SPRING 2008		FOCUS GROUP AVERAGE PRIORITY RATING FOR HELP MEETING THIS NEED MID-LATE 2008	ON-LINE SURVEY OF KING COUNTY FAMILIES N=305 SPRING 2009		
	Believe this need is unmet for most families	My family does not have this need met		Believe this need is unmet for most families	Believe this is the one area families most need help	My family needs help to meet this need
Adequate food	50%	4%	3	51%	4%	11%
Affordable housing	70%	30%	8	80%	35%	31%
Affordable wellness care	74%	25%	6	75%	14%	26%
Economic opportunities	59%	18%	6	70%	28%	34%
Education and learning experiences	43%	7%	8	37%	7%	25%
Safe neighborhood	44%	13%	2	44%	4%	24%
Stable, secure relationships	45%	8%	3	36%	6%	10%
Supportive, culturally relevant networks	40%	13%	8	31%	3%	19%

What are the next steps in the Irreducible Needs project?

Since our county is home to some of the world's most innovative research and philanthropy, it is more than fitting that our knowledge and resources be directed to the families in our community. The CFC plans the following next steps:

1. Disseminate the findings of this pilot phase of the Irreducible Needs project
2. Seek to expand the focus group work in two additional districts in the next year
3. Report back to the districts involved in the pilot phase in order to:
 - reflect what was heard
 - listen to what families think about these findings
 - deepen the understanding of what families' priorities are for meeting their needs
 - collaborate with families to plan action steps that would appropriately address their priority needs.

This work will contribute to the following outcomes for King County families:

- A comprehensive list of the basic needs of all families with children in which physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs are all seen as equally important for healthy development.
- A strengthened commitment to meet the basic needs of all families in our county.
- Dedicated efforts to preventing emotional deprivation and neglect which can wreak irreversible havoc over a person's life.
- Increased ability to address the growing levels of stressors on families which are compounded by lack of resources to meet irreducible needs.
- Increased focus on the need for culturally relevant networks to support families.

Commitments that will be implemented in the future work on Irreducible Needs

- Continue a culturally competent approach that includes seeking natural community leaders to conduct focus groups
- Plan time to develop relationships or extend existing relationships with community leaders
- Incorporate adequate time to explain and reiterate the process with the leaders
- Acknowledge the group's preferences for conducting the group and adapt the process to fit the group
- Seek input from the leaders and community members of each group to ensure that responses presented in reports accurately capture the perceptions, needs and proposed solutions stated by the group participants

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

The King County Children and Family Commission (CFC) was established in May 1992 by the County Executive and King County Council. In partnership with families, youth, schools, businesses, private funders, service providers, and government, the Commission works to build and sustain a healthy community. The CFC's purpose is to:

- Educate about the benefits of prevention and early intervention;
- Advocate for policies and actions that advance the healthy development of children, youth, families, and communities;
- Build partnerships that inspire working together to improve lives;
- Fund community-based prevention and early intervention programs that build family and individual strengths, demonstrate results, and prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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